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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000581

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/28/2028  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [VE](#)  
SUBJECT: THREE AMCIT FARC HOSTAGES: RICHARDSON SEEKS  
CHAVEZ'S HELP

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Classified By: ACTING POLITICAL COUNSELOR DANIEL LAWTON,  
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (C) Summary. New Mexico Governor Richardson traveled April 25-27 to Caracas as the personal emissary of the families of three Amcit FARC hostages. He met April 26 with President Chavez and other senior Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela officials to enlist the BRV's help in securing the Amcit hostages' release. Richardson told the Ambassador that he felt he achieved his main objectives of his trip: Chavez accepted Richardson as an interlocutor and pledged to re-engage with the FARC quietly. Chavez told Richardson that the FARC is disoriented after the deaths of Raul Reyes and Ivan Rios and fearful that the GOC will be able to exploit Reyes' computers to locate other FARC leaders (thus implying that both Chavez and the FARC consider the Reyes computer hard drives to be authentic). Chavez also reportedly expressed interest in improving bilateral relations and urged USG help to defuse political tensions in Bolivia. Richardson did not state his next steps, but seemed to suggest that he would try to visit Bogota again before returning to Caracas. End Summary.

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Richardson's Schedule  
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12. (SBU) In his remarks to the media while in Caracas, Richardson repeatedly stressed that he was not an official envoy of the USG or OAS, but rather the personal emissary of the families of three Amcit FARC hostages. Prior to meeting with President Chavez late on April 26, Richardson met with former Venezuelan Ambassador to Cuba Ali Rodriguez and then met with Foreign Minister Nicolas Maduro. Venezuela's Ambassador to Washington Bernardo Alvarez accompanied Richardson to all his meetings. The BRV requested and Richardson agreed that Embassy officials not attend any of the meetings with government officials.

13. (C) Richardson also agreed to meet five leaders of the Venezuela-American Chamber of Commerce (VenAmCham) at his hotel. The VenAmCham leaders briefed Richardson and the Ambassador on recent expropriations and the uncertain and politicized business climate in Venezuela. They stressed that BRV policies are discouraging direct foreign investment. In response to repeated requests from Ambassador Alvarez, Richardson agreed to meet with Colombian Senator Piedad Cordoba late on April 26. Cordoba failed to show up on time, so Richardson proceeded to dinner with the Ambassador and

DCM. He later spoke to Cordoba briefly by phone. Private consultant Mike Stratton and New Mexico Deputy Director of Communications Allan Oliver accompanied Richardson to all meetings.

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Humanitarian Mission  
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14. (C) After meeting with Chavez, Richardson told the Ambassador and DCM that he had accomplished his main goals. Richardson said Chavez accepted him as an interlocutor and indicated that he was willing to re-engage quietly to try to secure the release of FARC hostages, including the three Amcits. Chavez told Richardson that he was disappointed by a recent public statement by Colombian President Uribe in which Uribe said he does not want Chavez back in the hostage release process. Chavez said his reengagement would not be possible if Uribe continued to try to discredit him.

15. (C) Chavez also cautioned Richardson that further hostage releases would take time in the wake of the deaths of FARC leaders Raul Reyes and Ivan Rios. He said the FARC are disoriented due to the deaths of Reyes and Rios. He also commented that the FARC were worried that the GOC would be able to use the computers to locate them and therefore the FARC were having to rework all of their codes. (Comment: From Chavez's comments it appears that both Chavez and the FARC accept the computers as authentic. End Comment). Chavez also asserted he is not providing money or arms to the FARC, "not even a single cartridge." During his meeting with Richardson, Maduro expressed concern about the safety of Senator Cordoba.

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Bilateral Relations  
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16. (C) According to Richardson, Chavez said he wants a better relationship with the USG. Richardson said he told Chavez that he had been in touch with WHA A/S Shannon. Chavez commented positively on the professionalism of A/S Shannon and the Ambassador. He also instructed FM Maduro to meet with the Ambassador soon and said he would follow up with the Ambassador himself after that. Chavez added that the BRV wants to cooperate with the USG on counter-narcotics. Richardson noted that Chavez did not mention President Bush.

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The Region and Bolivia  
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17. (C) Richardson also told the Ambassador that Chavez briefly discussed his relations with other leaders in the region. Chavez asserted that he had positive relations with all other heads-of-state in South America except Uribe. Nevertheless, Richardson said Chavez spoke respectfully about the Colombian President. FM Maduro expressed concern about growing political tensions in Bolivia. Chavez said the USG needs to help diffuse tensions in Bolivia to avoid putting President Morales in the position of having to take drastic measures.

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Comment  
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18. (C) Richardson did not indicate what he believes his next step will be. He and his team, however, implied that they would likely try to visit Bogota again before returning to Caracas. They did not indicate when. One of Richardson's aides suggested to control officer that they hoped to engage eventually in shuttle diplomacy between the two capitals.

